Providence

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Providence

by Anonymous

Summary

When Mason Verger is murdered no one grieves not even his sister, but there still has to be an investigation. What it uncovers changes Will more than he could ever imagine.

Notes

In this universe Hannibal has been a captive of Mason Verger for several years, he does not know Alana Bloom or anyone else in Baltimore. Dr. Chilton is Wills psychiatrist, he keeps Wills encephalitis a secret to see what happens. Jack is Jack, Will is Will and Hannibal will eventually be Hannibal.

Chapter 1

Irritating repetitive noise blares, and Will swims into consciousness. Groggy and disorientated he struggles to sit up, the mattress shifts as one or other of the dogs slides swiftly off the bed, guilty but sneaky enough not to be caught. Prising his eyes open, Will fumbles for the source of the sound, heart rate a rapid taboo in his chest, anxiety from the unexpected noise or night terrors?

Tracking the noise to his phone, he squints at the screen, sighs gustily when he sees Jack's name on the screen but swipes to accept the call anyway.

“We need you.” Jack is blunt, disregarding all notions of courtesy.

“What? Jack?” He knows that Jack won't call him unless it's important, but his exhausted brain is struggling to wake up enough to function.

“There's been a murder down at the Verger Estate, you need to come and do your thing Will. Something isn't right.” Jack always thinks that scenes aren't right but unable to face an argument Will mumbles something he thinks sounds suitably agreeable and hangs up.

He staggers as he gets to his feet as a wave of dizziness sweeps over him. He feeds the dogs that mill at his feet and heads to the bathroom to change. In the mirror, he catches sight of his own tired face, dark shadow under his eyes. His Tee shirt is so sweaty that it makes an audible splat when he strips it off and dumps it on the floor. Stepping under the water he lets a shower sluice the worst of the sweat away and with it the last lingering vestiges of sleep.

Dressing he heads out to the car, squinting in the sunlight, Will twists the cap off the container of aspirin and crushes two between his back teeth. Hoping that the increased surface area will mean faster absorption and will force the headache that is clawing into his brain behind his eyes into submission.

Checking his phone for the details that Jack will have text him while he was in the shower, he sets up the maps and lets the voice prompts of the sat Nav guide him on his way. The woman's synthetic tones the only sound as he drives along.

When he pulls up through the gates and parks in front of an honest to god mansion, his headache has diminished a little but the bustle of activity he can see through the car windows tells him that the relief won't last.

Will sits in his seat, slumping down a little, driving the heels of his hands into his eyes to preemptively ward off the pain and looks miserably out at the figures scurrying around the courtyard. Breathing in deeply and bracing himself, he climbs out of the safety of the car and shivers as the cold winters air finds its way between gaps in clothes and under his layers.

“Will!”

Startling at the bark of his name, he all but slips on the icy paving, but Jack throws out a hand and grabs his arm tightly. The grip is bruising but Will doesn't complain and Jack seems too fraught to notice.

Glancing at Jack under his lashes as he is led along, Will doesn't need to be an empath to realise that Bella must have had a bad night. Jack looks ragged worn thin and tired by the demands of the bureau and his desperation for his wife.

Jack ushers them both through a side entrance and through a kitchen into a large dining room. It screams wealth, with gaudy chandeliers hanging from the ceiling and gold leaf on various embellished frames. The opulence of the room is diminished by the blood.

Thick and still wet, the blood covers almost every surface and tilting his head back Will can see it's on the ceiling. His empathy rises and his mind conjures up the image of a body's desperate struggling, the frantic movement sending blood flying in all directions. Despite the quantity of blood the room is still fairly ordered very little is out of place.

“Will, I need you to look at this. Tell me what you see.”

Stepping away from Jack and skirting around the largest pool of blood, Will moves towards the epicentre of the violence and closes his eyes, allows the pendulum to swing.

In his mind, the blood is wiped clean for the surfaces and the room adjusts itself slightly. Will sees figures sitting at the table they are getting ready to eat, it's late, later than dinner would ordinarily be. One of the two is exhausted, only still up at the instance of the other, afraid of their wrath. An argument he realises, between the two would be diners, one reaching out towards the other, aggression telegraphed in every movement.

Opening his eyes, Will sinks to his knees and looks under the table. A woman's necklace lies abandoned, Jack steps in before Will can touch it, picking up the jewellery in a gloved hand. Will can see blood, and hair caught between the chains links and closes his eyes again to visualise how that damage occurred. One of the diners, a woman, got up made to leave the table, to walk away, the other grabbed her. Pulling her back, grabbing her necklace and pulling it taught around a delicate throat.

He watches behind his eyelids as the woman struggles to escape, the necklace breaks, she runs, and her attacker hurls it away, where it lies abandoned. The woman isn't killed though, he knows this despite the odds, despite Jack telling him nothing of the case, not wanting to pollute his thinking. It's her attacker, but-

“It wasn't her.” Will turns to look at Jack then reiterates firmly, “ it wasn't her, the woman..”

“The sister,” Jack grunts the words in his direction without raising his eyes to meet Wills, still staring at the blood stained jewelry.

“There was someone else here, another person. They weren't sitting with them though.” He points at the two chairs that were still pushed away from the table. “They heard the noise, the screams. They came running in.” Will prowls, he knows this is what happened but he needs to find the evidence that his subconscious has already spotted, needs to show it to Jack.

“Ahh!” Will points at a rug, “He came running, he saw the fight and he dived in to help. He had to. He just had to help.”

“You're sure there was another.” It's not really a question, Jack states it flatly, he wants Will to confirm whatever hypothesis he has already built in his mind.

Wordlessly Will points at the rug again, with more emphasis, Jack follows the movement but no illumination shows on his face. “It's off center.”

Jack looks so unimpressed by Wills short statement that he feels compelled to follow through, to fill in the silence, despite knowing it's a trick. It's taught at the academy, his psychiatrist Chilton uses it on him, or tries to, hell, Will has even used it himself a few times. “This place is perfect,” he reminds Jack, “picture perfect. The rug slid when someone came running in. In a house like this, not even the children will be running for play. There are only two reasons why they would be running, towards something or away from it.”

Jack raises an eyebrow and nods faintly. His facial expression doesn't change though and Will feels sweat prick under his arms, discomforted by his inability to read Jack clearly, to know if he'd said enough. At the beginning of an investigation, Jack runs everyone ragged and Will feels exhausted enough to start with. He wishes he was at home with such intense longing that it brings tears to his eyes for a moment. The quiet company of his dogs is all he can think of beyond how much he hopes Jack won't start yelling.

“You should come and see this, sir.”

Will turns to see a uniformed local police officer, talking to Jack. Will rubs at his temples and lets the noise of their chatter wash over him, not attempting to follow.

“Will, with me.”

At the order Will grits his teeth and falls obediently into line, following Jacks broad back through the corridors of the mansion. They head down three flights of stairs and end up in a basement. The officer leads them through the dimly lit space. Ahead Will can see a brighter light and hear voices. As they get closer he recognises Beverly's and knows that means Price and Zeller are close by too. Having Beverly be here is a help, she is perceptive to his needs and is great a deflecting attention away from him when she can, but Zeller sends pangs of anxiety through him. His headache ratchets up another notch.

When they join the rest of the group Will gets his first inkling into how bad this case might turn out to be, no one says anything to him, Zeller doesn't even take the opportunity to pass judgement on Wills bedraggled appearance. Beverly is pale and her mouth is set in a thin bloodless line, beside her Jimmy is patting her arm sympathetically but he is staring at the wall opposite and his jaw is set tight, a nerve twitching under his eye.

Jack pushes past them, gently for Jack, who normally blunders past people, moving aside obstacles with his bulk.

There is a long pause, and the atmosphere becomes even tenser.

“Will?”

Will steps forward at Jack’s prompting.

“What’s this?” Jack asks his voice tight, he doesn't turn to look at Will as he asks and Will can feel the tension Jack’s body where it is against his own in the narrow hallway.

Will steps to the side as Jack steps back allowing him to look.

“Tell me what you see.”

Will steps in. Lets the pendulum swing. Immediately feels two dissenting voices about the little space in which he finds himself. “I keep him here, A cell, a mere container. A fitting one for one who has sunk as low as he has. I strip him of comfort, of warmth, of light if I so choose. I am a god to him, I giveth and I taketh. This is my design.”

“ *I exist here, I do not live. Yet I am comforted here despite my owner's attempts. I am safe here in a way that I am nowhere else, he rarely comes here, when he wants me i am made to go to him. Here I am forgotten and can simply be without the need for constant, exhausting attentiveness. I can be at peace, with my memories for company.”*

Will starts out of his headspace when a hand is laid over his arm, and for a moment his eyes can only see solid sheets of colour as his headache tears ruthlessly at his brain.

“Will?”

Will blinks until his vision clears, and the headache simmers down to a tolerable level. He is disoriented again, the conflicting points of view in his head obliterating everything else for a few more moments before he can remember who he is and what's happening.

“What is it?”

“It's a cell.” Zeller is the one to answer Jack, his tone angry, but his face afraid. Zeller nibbles on his thumb nail, while he stares past Jack and through Will at the dingy room.

“It's a cell.” Will agrees though it's obvious really. “He kept someone here, tried to deny them everything. He wanted to be everything to them, he wanted them to only have food or light or company at his hand. He wanted to break them.”

There is a silence, that is broken when Beverly's breath hitches a little, not enough to be anywhere close to a sob, but nonetheless a sound of misery and shock.

“It didn't work.” Will continues this time, not to fill the silence but as a clumsy attempt at comfort, he knows that there is none, not really for those who work these jobs. The things they see are too much for one brain to hold, they grow adept at not seeing, but this is new and raw somehow. The patheticness of the living space is evident but there are little signs of defiance.

The rags which presumably make up the bed when the occupant is allowed to sleep are hung over an exposed pipe. Wil touches them they are slightly damp still, they had been rinsed in

the tiny sink, an attempt at hygiene and pride. Approaching the sink, Will runs his fingers around the rusted metal, there is a gap between the bottom section and the wall. Someone has hidden a small ball of soap. It's been made up from slithers of many different soaps, clearly stolen over time from the house above and smuggled down here to allow the occupant of this gristly little hole a semblance of normality. Will rubs his fingers over the blob and wonders whether the occupant has stolen it or whether they had been brought down to him, perhaps by the sister he helped to save.

He heads home after a long day, grateful for the dogs, they crawl over each other to get to him when he comes home, tails wagging and noses bumping into his hands and legs. He sits on the floor just inside his front door and pets soft fur until he can feel his anxiety and tension dissipate to an acceptable level. He lets the dogs out into the garden and watches for a moment through the window as the dogs scamper after each other and nose through the undergrowth, chasing interesting smells. He eats at the sink, turns the taps on to wash away the crumbs then, heads out to join the dogs. The weather is cold but clear, his breath forms clouds as he walks, he walks slower than usual and feels more tired when he finally makes it home, crashing out onto his bed while still wearing his jeans. His last deliberate act is to place his glasses just under the bed out of harm's way.

He wakes in the morning freezing, standing outside, bare foot his toes and fingers tinged blue. Dismayed to be sleep walking again he calls Chilton, who does nothing to ease his anxieties, reiterating the diagnosis of mental illness. Shivery and miserable, Will ends up rushing his morning routine and is just on time for his first lesson. His head pounds under the lights, and the screen seems to flicker and warp when he's not looking directly at it. Twice he stops to answer questions, certain he'd heard a student call to him, but both times no one speaks up. The whole room stares blankly back at him, and he's too frightened by what it might mean to challenge them on whether it's a prank. When the class is just about wrapping up he's actually relieved to see Jack, he doesn't think he'll be able to manage another lesson, his mind feels wooly, thoughts stretching apart under their own weight or dissolving into mist when he tries to gather them.

“We’re heading to BSHCI and we need you with us.” Jack looks straight at him his dark gaze burrowing into Will. Will has never been more grateful that he often refuses to make eye contact because at the words his stomach drops as he wonders what how Jack knows. “ Alana is going to be interviewing a suspect in the Verger case and i want you on the scene. I want you to watch this guy, tell me if you get anything from him.”

Will feels relief flood through him, as a hot rush, leaving him light headed and shaky. He nods, not wanting to talk afraid that his voice would catch and Jack wouldn't rest till he'd bullied the reason out of him.

Jack drives, and Will sits staring out of the window, letting his body go limp and moving with the sway of the vehicle. Watches the scenery as it passes. When the car jolts to a stop outside the hospital he doesn't know if he's missed time or simply zoned out or even if he dropped off during the ride. He bites his lip and doesn't dare look at Jack in case he gives himself away somehow. Jack strides into the building, a man on a mission, he broad bulk and no nonsense demeanor send the staff on duty running for Chilton, who signs them both in with the bare minimum of interaction. Will feels another layer of tension spring into life, having Chilton

and Jack in the same room feels desperately uncomfortable as he knows one word from Chilton could be enough to ruin him. He imagines himself building boat motors for a few moments, reading about the murders in the papers, knowing he could, should, be helping, but that he can't due to his inability to keep himself together. Will blows out a breath in frustration, scrubs his hands through his hair and braces himself for several anxious hours, all the while his head's pounding rises in time with his quickening heart rate, while his body aches.

Jack moves off and Will follows him feeling awkward and unnecessary. Alana is waiting for them and Will tries to find a smile for her, her face creases into sympathetic lines, so he assumes that it wasn't a great attempt.

"Are you alright Will." Alana reaches out towards him as she speaks, Will realises that he's having visual disturbances only when he fails to notice her hand until it's almost on his cheek. He flinches hard and she pulls her hand back. "Sorry, you look quite flushed, are you sure you're alright?"

"He's fine, aren't you Will?" Jack nudges him gently in the ribs and despite barely touching him Will feels his body ache at the impact. " It's pretty windy out."

Alana smiles but her eyes are still studying Will and he finds himself pinking further under her gaze.

"Alright, let's get on." Jack claps his hands together to draw their attention, "you know what you need to do Alana.."

"I still think he shouldn't be here Jack he seems as much a victim in this as.."

"We have no idea who he is or where he's from, Margot says he was the one to murder her brother but says that he was trying to protect her. And he admits it. It's the only thing we know Alana, I can't bail him, I can leave him in a normal hospital, it's here or a holding cell."

"He's frightened, Jack."

"We don't know what he is or isn't because he won't talk to us. You need to question him and Will is going with you to pull his empathy tricks see if he can get a feel for this guy. Right, Will? You need to see if this guy killed Mason because he was mad, bad or sad."

"Was he the man from the basement?" He knows the answer, can feel it in his bones, the only answer is in the way the eyes of the others slide away from him for a change. Alana finding her shoes fascinating while Jack stares at the wall his hands clenching and unclenching.

"All set for you."

Jack nods his thanks to the young nurse and Will finds himself being ushered along, without knowing why dread pools in his stomach. He doesn't want anything to do with this, he pictures fixing boat motors again and finds a level of contentment in the scene that had been missing a few minutes before. Maybe it would be better to be forced from the field if the choice was taken from him, then future deaths wouldn't be entirely his fault. Even as he

thinks it he knows he’s lying to himself. He would blame himself for every death when he could piece together the killer from the papers, every innocent life lost when he wasted away living an overly simplistic life when he should be helping others.

They are lead into a little room, the table that the prisoner is chained to takes up most of the room, with the three of them it's quite a squash. It's still nearly twice the size of the man's old cell.

Alana drops into a seat and gestures Will into the once next to her, Will sinks into it and looks at the man in the chair opposite him. Despite having never met the man or being told about him he still feels surprised at what he looks like. Sitting bolt upright, surprisingly good posture for someone so malnourished, the suspect watches them both. Will is impressed that he seems so calm, having been apparently held captive for god knows how long and then been arrested and having spent the night in a high-security prison the man, Will would have expected shock, dismay or even anger, but the man regards them calmly as though he had personally invited them and they were about to have dinner.

“Good morning,” Alana tries to keep things on track, but the voice she uses pitched at friendly comes across too jovially. It's the voice people who aren't accustomed to children use when they are in their company, or the voice Will uses on his dogs when there is no one around. He winces, despite himself then freezes when the man opposite him fixes his gaze on him. Despite having only turned his head an inch or so to do so the focus of the man's attention is so strong that Will feels as though he might start up in flames at any moment. He knows Alana notices it too when she stiffens next to him. Will has a moment to feel thankful that he feels so under the weather as if he felt well he thinks the feel of her thigh pressed against his own might make him react. “This is my colleague Will Graham,” Alana continues still in the terrible tone of voice, “and I’m Alana Bloom we met yesterday, do you remember?”

The man drags his eyes away from Will’s face as though it physically pains him to do so, and nods at Alana. Will stares at the bridge of the man's nose and uses his peripheral vision to take in his face while he's occupied. High cheek bones, reddish eyes, though that must be due to the light or possibly some kind of eye infection, given his living conditions it's a strong possibility.

As though feeling the scrutiny the man looks back and Will hurries to look away.

“Not fond of eye contact, are you?”

Alana twitches at the sound of the man's voice, turning to look at Will too.

Will pauses for a moment, overwhelmed, his headache a constant scream now. “Eyes are distracting you see too much, you don’t see enough. And-And it’s hard to focus when you’re thinking, um, “Oh, those whites are really white”, or, “He must have hepatitis”, or, “Oh, is that a burst “vein?” So, yeah, I try to avoid eyes whenever possible. Jack?” He glances up at the door, rubbing at his temples trying to dislodge the agony. The clink of chains drags his attention back to the man, who's moved he's leaning forwards as far as the chains will allow. Cries of alarm go up and Jack moves, Alana’s chair scrapes as she stands.

Calmly, serenely the man sniffs, then sits back.

“Did you just *smell* me?” Will demands incredulous.

The man smiles just a little, lips quirking.

Nurses pour into the room and hands press onto the man's shoulders holding him down onto the chair, Will looks up a bit bewildered, Jack has Alana, has stepped between her and the prisoner his body angled defensively. Will feels a rush of chagrin, he should have stepped in to help her, he doesn't think this man means either of them harm right now, but he should have demonstrated better protective instincts towards her. Shown her how reliable he can be, cursing the missed opportunity, he is startled from his thoughts when Chilton appears with a mask. The nurses strap it around the guy's face and then step away.

“Is that necessary?” Will blurts, wondering why he is protesting on this guys behalf, but feeling as though this is overkill. “What’s he going to do eat us?”

Across the table the man chuckles, a rich sound, soon cut off but his shoulders continue to move gently betraying his mirth. The whole room stares at him, and Will feels another wave of pity, it all feels like high school, he'd been there, you laugh at the wrong thing and everybody thinks you're crazy. He catches himself grimacing at the other man in sympathy.

“While you might be the tastiest thing I’ve laid eyes on in a long time, eating you is not my first order of business,” Will can hear the careful way in which the man says the phrase despite the slight muffling effect of the mask, with his accent it makes it clear that while he speaks English well he's not a native. “Rather I thought I smelt infection when you walked in,” Will makes an aborted squawking sound of protest, one he hadn't realised he could make. “That together with your obvious photophobia and clear signs of pain make me think you have some kind of illness. Perhaps encephalitis or meningitis.”

Will stares at him, then glances at the others, Alana is looking at him consideringly.

“I had a scan with Dr Sutcliff,” he says hesitantly, “can either of thise cause sleep walking?”

The man hums, “there are many symptoms, including hallucinations, vision problems..”

“A scan ruled those out,” Chilton says it sharply, his hands laced together but his knuckles are white.

“Draw me a clock.”

Will looks back at the man, forces himself to meet those red irises.

“A clock?”

Alana steps forwards this time, “to check his visual spatial abilities.” She nods and gestures to Will stands, his chair makes the same screech on the tiles, as he does the lights seem to flicker a little and he sways. Jack steps away from Alana and grabs Will’s elbow, Will finds himself leaning into the support. He lets Jack lead him out of the room and into an identical but empty one next door. Alana drops the file she's holding in front of him turning it so the

blank reverse is facing him, Jack digs a pen out of his jacket pocket and drops that on top of the file.

“Draw a clock, Will,” Alana says, she half leaning over his shoulder now, Will can smell her perfume. It's soothing, floral, nice. “ Draw a clock with the hands showing the time of 11.10.”

Trying desperately to push down his hope that maybe he's fixable, Will picks up the pen in shaking hands, and draws a clock, carefully putting the numbers in.

“11.10? Right?” He asks looking up, and knows instantly he's got it wrong, Jack looks appalled.

Alana picks up the file and looks at it sadly. “Stay here, Will, I'll make a few calls, you're going to need another scan, I should think. Does your head hurt now?” Will nods, wincing openly now as the movement causes the pain echoing throughout his skull to flare and she bustles off leaving him with Jack.

“Is it wrong?” he knows it must be but it looks fine to him, so fine that he wonders if *this* is a hallucination, this neat end to his troubles. Perhaps this is just a last desperate act of a decaying mind.

“It's.. Well, it's not right, son.” Jack says heavily, guilt in his tone. “ You'll be alright though we'll get you fixed right up, don't you worry.”

One of Jack’s hands come down on his shoulder, squeezes gently. “You'll be alright, son.” Jack reiterates, Will can picture his face as he says it, determined as though saying it will make it so. “If you're in the hospital, you'll have to come down and visit Bella, she’ll be grateful for the company.”

The hand doesn't leave his shoulder until Alana returns, phone still in her hand.

“I'll have to interview him tomorrow Jack,” she says gesturing through the wall, “Will, You’ve got an appointment in 45 minutes we need to get moving so you don't miss it.”

The rest of the day passes in a blur, Will is shuttled about, given a gown to wear, scanned. His results are discussed. A drip is set up and he's given some pain relief that actually touches his headache. The relief of pain makes him woozier than the medication and he can barely stay awake long enough to ensure that Alana will feed his dogs for him.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hospitals are boring, Will thinks, but he doesn't know what's worse, being alone in the hospital or when he has visitors. When he's alone time crawls by achingly slowly, yet whenever someone visits him he finds himself utterly exhausted by the human interaction, he falls asleep on several of his visitors.

Beverly leaves him a cheery note, telling him if he was so bored by her he could have just said so. She'd decorated it with a smiley face and left him some candy so he knew she wasn't really offended.

Alana drops by to apologize for not noticing how unwell he was sooner, a visit which is awkward in the extreme and brings his headache back at such a rate he nearly crumples under the blinding pain.

He's only been in for two days but already he's planning his escape.

Rather than act on his plans and risk the ire of the nursing staff, half of whom seem to think he's a large child and unable to take care of himself, they straighten his bed clothes and call him honey, the rest seem utterly unimpressed with his snarky attitude, he takes Jack up on his suggestion and goes to visit Bella.

She is just the right amount of sarcastic and motherly he needs to relax in the overwhelming hospital environment and true to his new patterns he falls asleep at her bedside while she tells him about Italy, trying to persuade him to take a holiday.

He wakes muzzy and confused to murmured voices and thinks for a moment he has fallen asleep in class, before remembering that he's in his thirties now, his school days are long behind him. He tries to sit up and look dignified, but given the way both Bella and Jack look at him as he scrapes his hands over his face in an effort to wake up, he suspects that he has missed the mark by some considerable margin.

Bella has an amused smirk on her face as she looks at his hair and Will knows deep down that he looks even more like a wild man than usual, Will smiles, sheepish and apologetic, and tries to tame his hair, run his hands through it, Jack joins his wife in smirking now, eyebrows rising as he surveys the apparent wreckage of his hair. Admitting defeat and seriously considering a hair cut Will gives it up as a bad job.

"You look better, Will."

"Yeah, you too." Will replies reflexively before remembering that wasn't quite how social interaction was supposed to go, he grins half heartedly at Jack, hoping his slip up goes unnoticed, and fiddles with his glasses, rearranging them more comfortably on his face and trying to draw attention away from his mistake.

“It's good to see you, I need to speak to you about the Verger Case, you see-”

“Jack.” Bella puts a hand over one of Jack’s to stop him speaking for a moment, her tone reproachful but still with the undercurrent of affection.

“I just need Will’s input, we need to know if this guy is dangerous or if he needs our help-”

“Jack.” Her voice is former now, one eyebrow hinting at a rise.

“It's alright,” Will interrupts them both, secretly thinking that this could be his ticket out of the hospital, “I don't mind hearing about it, what's happening?” He asks Jack directly, despite Bella raising a second eyebrow of warning.

Jack looks between Will and his wife before accepting her request, “I'll speak to you some other time.” Will knows this means later in every single cell of his body. He smiles inwardly while trying to keep his face straight.

Jack finds him later, as Will knew he would, then does the Crawford version of sweet talk on the nurses until they agree to allow Will out of hospital for a few hours, Will has no idea if the nurses are responding to the kinder, gentler Jack (TM) or if they are just terrified and throwing Will to the proverbial lion to get him to go away. Probably a little of both he acknowledges to himself.

He sleeps better that night knowing that he's getting out of the hospital in the morning, if only for a little while. He drops off to sleep planning all the ways he can persuade Jack to stop at burger king on the way back to the hospital.

In the morning he is released in his old clothes, they bag now on his frame despite only having only been hospitalised for a few days, and a pair of hospital slippers because he's misplaced his own shoes and Jack is too antsy to wait for him to find them. He shuffles to the car, feeling the wind whip around his bare ankles and is grateful to climb into the warmth of the car. He drops off again as they drive and only wakes when Jack nudges his shoulder gently, Will opens his eyes and climbs out of the car, groggy and disorientated, his eyes gritty still tired despite having slept for the past few days more or less continuously. They sign in at the hospital, met by Alana who is covering for Chilton pending an investigation, Jack tells him in a gleeful undertone.

Will glances sharply at Jack, and raises a questioning eyebrow, not wanting to make a big deal of it in case Alana feels guilty again, but wanting to know if Chilton's investigation is about him. Jack's smirk is answer enough and he squirms awkwardly wondering if he should feel guilty.

He gets ushered towards the same interview room, but Alana stops him, with a hand on his forearm, before he can open the door.

“He's been charged,” she says nodding at the door, then clarifies, “the man from the Vergers.” As though Will may have mistakenly thought her words were about the door rather than the man behind it.

Will frowns, “surely there is a case for acting under duress?”

“Yes, but we can't let him go. He's admitted murder, Will. We have to, it's important to do everything by the book. Vergers lawyers are nosing around and there is significant publicity surrounding this case. Tread carefully.”

Beside Jack, Alana nods her agreement, reluctant but there. “He won't speak to anyone, Will. He responded to you last time and-”

“And you want to see whether he's imprinted like a baby duck?”

“Will!” Jack sighs his name, managing to sound both forceful and disappointed.

It's impressive Will thinks to be able to convey so much with one syllable. “What do you want me to ask him?” Anxiety bubbles, he hadn't known he was going alone and having the change thrust upon him makes him anxious. Will fiddles with his cuffs, folding them down so they cover his wrists, tugging them further before reaching up to adjust his glasses, before readjusting them again.

“Let's see if he'll talk to you first. He would last time, and he hasn't said anything really since, Please and thank you mostly. We do need information from him, like what the hell was happening down there in that Estate, Will. How was he involved? Who is he? He's going to need a defense for his trial. We can't give him one unless he speaks up.”

“You think he'll be found guilty, even based on his living conditions?” Will rubs between his eyes, feeling the strain of the situation weighing on him.

Jack shrugs a reply, pats Will on the shoulder.

Will shrugs helplessly back for lack of anything concrete to say and pushes open the door.

The man sits in the same seat as before, still straight backed, posture perfect, despite the faint bruising on his face, the prison clothing and the handcuffs tethering him to the table he still manages to look relaxed and dignified, in a way in which Will cannot manage even when he's really trying. Admiration at the guy’s calm resolve bubbles up and he can't help but smile slightly.

The expression of the other man's face doesn't change and Will feels his spirits drop still, hurt bubbling up, surprising and unwelcome, wishing he'd stayed in the hospital despite how bored he'd been.

For a moment the stray thought is so unlike him that it throws him off guard and he doesn't sit down immediately, pauses while he tries to think through the thought process which leads him to prefer his hospital bed over this interview.

Realising he's been standing silently for too long without moving Will blushes, feeling absurdly shy and foolish, he sits quickly and makes a show of shuffling his chair in close to the table while avoiding eye contact. When he looks across the table at the other's face he makes sure to stare hard between his eyebrows, feigning eye contact as adeptly as he can.

“You shouldn't be here.”

Will startles and makes eye contact before dragging his gaze away to look towards Jack despite the door between them, elated that the other has chosen to speak, and to him. Then the meaning of the words filters through and he jerks in his seat, feeling the words like a blow, he shifts in his seat trying to hide his discomfort at the sentiment, trying not to analyse why he feels so hurt by it.

“You should still be in the hospital.”

Relief floods his veins, but rather than soothing him, Will feels more agitated, he makes eye contact again, startled and further discomforted by the red irises, “I’m fine.” He means to say it firmly, but it comes out overly harshly, the words clipped. Silence falls on them, Will feels the rush of emotions bleed away, leaving him tired, he rubs his hands over his face feeling his stubble, beard nearly now, pricking at his palms, blows air out hard enough to move his fringe. He means to apologize, he should not be attacking this guy after he has correctly identified what was wrong, not after he'd facilitated getting the treatment Will had apparently been needing for months and had been denied, but when he opens his mouth all that falls out into the air between them is, “What’s your name?”

Will is bizarrely pleased to see the other change their expression, it's subtle, but the twitch and slow blink clearly demonstrate the other's surprise, and he grins apologetically, opening his mouth to put it into words when he's cut off, “Hannibal.”

“Seriously?” Will blurts the words, before clapping a palm over his mouth, “sorry, sorry. Don’t - don't listen to me.” He pulls his hands away, repeats his apologies where they can be heard rather than mumbling them into his own palm.

The other guy- Hannibal, now he's had a moment to think about it Will supposes it suits him, it's weird, but then he's kind of weird looking, all angles and red eyes, in the harsh light of the interview room he looks faintly demonic, doesn't look too impressed at his outburst, but he nods at Will’s apology, accepting it graciously.

“Now i have answered your question perhaps you will answer one for me? Why are you not still in hospital?”

“I’m fine now, much better, thank you, by the way. I didn't know what was wrong, it was a huge relief to finally have a diagnosis.”

“Names have power, by naming things we give ourselves a form of mastery over them.” Hannibal nods blithely leaning back in his chair and lacing his fingers together where they lie attached to the table top. “Not ‘much better though’ as you still have your cannula in.”

Will drops his eyes to the cannula in his hand and can't prevent himself from touching it with his index finger of the other hand. “Much better than I was. I don't feel dangerous anymore.”

Hannibal smiles at his words and flattered Will smiles hesitantly back, letting his eyes slide over Hannibal's shoulder and looking at the wall to give himself time to compose himself.

“What was so important that Jack Crawford pulled you from your sick bed?”

“You.” Surprised Will meets Hannibal’s gaze again, and it occurs to him that he hasn't looked anyone in the eye so much in such a small space of time since his dad died. “How did you know Jack’s name?” Immediately Will bites his lip, he had just confirmed Jack’s identity to Hannibal.

“Is it a secret?”

“Well, no I don't think so?”

“So, what is it about me that has Jack interrupting your convalescence? I have already confessed, I did so at the scene. I am sure that Margot will have given a very similar account of events.”

“Well, you haven't given an account, you just accepted responsibility.”

“You need more? Proof? Words? What do you need? So that I can put dear Jack’s mind at rest and see that you are returned to the hospital.”

“It's procedure to get a full timeline of events, and so far we have no idea who you are.”

“Hannibal Lecter, MD. I was working at John Hopkins Hospital until a change in circumstances.”

“Mason Verger?”

Hannibal hummed a vague agreement but didn't say anything and Will felt disinclined to push, given the stoicism Hannibal had been demonstrating it felt wrong to badger him, as though whatever he was hiding would be too awful to speak of. Will feels shame rise and just as swiftly anger towards Jack, he's not supposed to be doing interviews even when he's well, and he's not well.

“I'm just going to-” Will gestures encompassing half the building with one clumsy wave of his hand, before pulling himself out of his seat and heading quickly out of the room, trying not to look like he's fleeing. Angry with himself for feeling the need to flee.

“Hannibal Lecter, a doctor at John Hopkins.” He tells Jack without pausing for breath or explaining why this information was so important that he left the interview to deliver it.

“What else?”

Despite knowing it's a reasonable question Will feels another surge of annoyance at Jack's brusque reply.

“Nothing, that's all he said.”

“Well, why-? Will?”

“I don't know that I'm the best person to ask him, Jack, I don't think-”

“You're the only one. Will, he won't talk to anyone else. Nothing. Not a peep.”

“Maybe we should give him some space? You saw where he was being kept?”

“Did he tell you that's where he was?”

“Well no but-”

“The sister says he was kept down there, but I'm not sure Will. Beverly says the baby knew him.”

Will looks blankly at Jack. “Baby?” He asks weakly, leaning into the door jam and resting his head against the cool brick. His head aches and he suddenly feels exhausted again, his legs tremble and his thighs ache as though he's walked for miles. “What baby?”

“Margot Verger’s baby. A boy. As specified in her father's will in order to inherit should anything befall her brother.”

“You think it's Hannibal's baby?” Will feels a stab of something in his chest and tells himself that it's his illness.

“I don't know Will, but the boy wouldn't even look at the officers at the scene. He waved to Hannibal though. Even though Hannibal was still covered in his uncle's blood. Hannibal wasn't a stranger.”

“Jack- Jack, I still don't think he murdered Verger because-”

“I'm certain he killed Verger, the question now is whether it is manslaughter or murder.”

“Jack!”

Jack stops and stares at Will, “We need to know, it's important.”

A headache pounding at the inside of his skull and anxious, his anxiety increasing as he tries to pinpoint the reasons for his own anxiety, Will takes his glasses off and rubs at his eyes, his hands shake. “Jack, I think I might be finished today. I'm sorry. I know you wanted more but i don't feel-”

“Will, we need to do this soon, now, we need to know what we are dealing with.”

Wishing he'd never left the hospital but feeling too exhausted to fight Jack anymore and unable to articulate his reluctance Will turns and heads back into the interview room.

Hannibal sits serenely in his chair with his head tilted slightly back, his eyes closed, breathing deeply, he opens his eyes when Will drops into his chair. Will holds his hands up apologetically, regretting having disturbed Hannibal.

“You should probably head back to the hospital now,” Hannibal sounds gentle, as though he's talking to a young child, and for a moment Will resents it. “Does your head hurt? You're shaking.”

He is, Will realises distantly, looking down at his fists, clenched on the table top. It strikes him for a moment as terribly amusing that Hannibal is being held on murder charges and looks completely at ease whereas he's free to go as he pleases and is a complete wreck.

“Yeah, yeah, no. I need to ask you a few more questions, Hannibal.”

Hannibal stares at him without speaking for a long moment and Will squirms under the scrutiny but it doesn't dissuade Hannibal, who continues to regard him in silence.

After a few long moments, he finds himself relaxing under the other's gaze, tiredness making the decision for him when he cannot maintain his anxiety.

“I think,” there is a pause and Hannibal cocks his head slightly, an expression passes over his face but drains away before Will can make sense of it. “It might be best if I refused to talk to you anymore today. I presume that's the reason Jack fetched you here? If I don't cooperate he will presumably allow you to go home?”

“He's not forcing me-” Will protests even as a little voice in his head asks him why he is doing so.

“Jack Crawford wants you to find out what was happening at the Verger Estate,” Hannibal states his piece as calmly as ever and Will envies him his unflappable nature, especially as he himself feels hopelessly out of his depth. “And you will tell him,” there is a slight pause, not long enough to really qualify but a beat of silence that draws Will’s attention. “When I have chosen to tell you.”

“And you aren't going to do that today?”

“No, Will. Go home. Get some rest.” Having said his piece, Hannibal leans back in his chair again, tips his head back a little, closes his eyes and proceeds to do an excellent impression of a statue. It's vaguely creepy to watch a human being become so still and unresponsive. Will waits for a few seconds just to see if Hannibal will do anything else, before getting back to his feet.

“Back again?” Jack meets him at the door, eyebrows raised.

“He won't speak to me anymore today.”

Jack makes an abortive move, then stills. “Why not?”

Will considers telling the truth and telling Jack that he's been given his doctor's orders to go back to bed, but something about it makes him feel uncomfortable to reveal the care to Jack. Instead, he just shrugs and holds both his hands out, palms up like he's protesting his innocence.

Jack pushed past him and into the interview room, Will leans against the wall and listens to a very one sided conversation for a few minutes.

Jack returns looking irritated, he jerks his head in the direction of the door and doesn't speak as they leave. It's only when they are back in the car, driving towards the hospital that Jack

finally glances over.

“We can't help him if he won't help himself.”

“Do you want to help him?”

Jack makes an irritated noise and flutters a hand as though he's swatting a fly.

It's not an answer though, Will thinks as he leans back in his seat and tips his head back against the headrest and closing his eyes.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to everyone for reading, leaving kudos etc. This is my first fic in this fandom so I was a bit nervous about posting.

Chapter 3

When they arrive back at the hospital Will is shaking with exhaustion, it takes literally all he has to crawl from the car back to his bed, Jack has had a chance to calm down on the car ride and has inexplicably morphed back into caring, paternal Jack. He growls at the nurses who get Will's I.V reconnected in what Will would swear must be a world record breaking time.

Shutting his eyes against the glare of the overhead lights, someone, Will chooses for the sake of his newly restored sanity to believe that it's not Jack, places a damp washcloth over his forehead and his eyes. The coolness seeps the heat and pain out of his head and Will sighs with relief, a hand squeezes his shoulder, nope, definitely not Jack, these nurses need some refresher courses about bedside manner. Footsteps leave the room, and Will doesn't so much fall asleep as the waters of unconsciousness close up over him.

He dreams though disjointed images of a stag in a cage, shedding fur and feathers. Blood oozes from under a locked door, Will cups his hands fills them with water from his river and tries to wash it away, but when he looks again it's blood seeping between his fingers, running down his arms. He tries to offer water to the stag but it turns it's head away. The river drains to a trickle and bones litter the river bed, sharp and broken.

Will wakes, not with a jolt, but slowly, like getting into a hot bath he dips into consciousness then pulls back, blinking awake for longer and longer periods. It takes a hand sliding through his sweaty hair to pull him to the surface of his consciousness.

Opening his eyes feels like an achievement, the light hits his retinas and Will slams them closed again as tear jump reflexively forwards, he blinks them open again and the hand in his hair slides down his forehead to shield his eyes for him. Grunting in unintelligible thanks Will, attempts to gather himself.

"Wha'?" He voice cracks and his mouth is dry he now realises, his tongue thick and useless, he runs it round his mouth trying to gather some moisture.

"I thought turnabout was fair play."

Will relaxes at Bella's voice, her hand retreats a little up his forehead smoothing at the frown that is gathering between his eyes.

"You' better?" Will croaks slightly more understandably, thankfully Bella has spent years decoding Jacks distracted mutterings and gets the point Will is trying to make.

"Probably better than you right now, I won't say I told you so, because to be fair I didn't. I just implied it very loudly, but it turns out, shockingly, that going running off while you're still recovering can trigger a relapse." Her voice is filled with so much fond frustration that Will can picture her face, lips pursed, brow wrinkled, amusement and annoyance visible in her eyes, and beyond that his father's when he'd been a teenager.

"Relapse?"

She hums in agreement, her hand leaves his face and Will blinks his eyes still not quite adjusted to the light, a straw pokes at his chin and Will grunts in surprise before leaning forwards and talking a long draw. The water is tepid and tastes like the plastic cup it's in but it's wonderful. Refreshing and soothes his dry throat and cracked lips. “You've been drifting in and out of consciousness for the better part of two days now, your temperature was very high at first but you've responded to treatment. The doctors say you'll make a full recovery.” She pauses for a moment. “But pull another stunt like that and I'll kill you myself.”

Will grins sheepishly, “sorry.”

“You should be it's boring without you here, and Jack felt guilty, he hovers when he feels guilty, so if you're going to make him feel like that could you at least be available to deal with the fallout please?”

“I’ll keep that in mind.” Will tries to promise seriously, while thinking that he'd do nothing of the sort.

Bella raises and eyebrow and smiles, Will knows that she's figured him out and smiles back, relaxed, too tired and groggy to be worried.

“You're friend is alright.” Bella tells him after a few long moments where neither of them say anything.

“Huh?”

“Your friend, the one with the weird name? Jack said you've been mumbling about him, well according to Beverly he's fine. Still won't say a word but- don't you even think about getting out of bed. I know where Jack keeps his gun, Will. So lay back down, mister.”

Will slumps back against the pillows, ignoring the flare of his temper that rises at her words.

“He's fine, you'll be able to get back there in a few more days. Why are you so concerned anyway? It seems like it must be an open and shut case surely? It said in the papers that there was a missing person's report filed on Dr Lecter by his colleagues several years ago and Margot says -”

“Margot?”

“Mason, the dead man, his sister. She has been seeing Alana, and she was down here a few days ago. It's all hush hush FBI secrets, so of course the whole hospital knows the gossip. Oh, that reminds me a patient of Dr. Chilton has confessed to being the Chesapeake Ripper.”

It takes Will a few long moments to digest the swell of information.

“The Ripper?”

“Yes, it's reassured Jack to think that he's not still roaming the streets. The evidence seems to stack up according to your co workers.”

“Does nobody keep secrets.”

“Not from me, Will.” Her grin is sharp and pleased. He can't help but grin back, shaking his head as he does.

“Alright, get some more sleep, I mean it. You look like, well I don't even know what you look like, nothing good though.” She pulls his blankets straight as she gets up. “Sleep, Will. Jack will probably be down to see you once he knows you're awake. Don't let him drag you off anywhere.” She was a finger accusingly at him, “stay in bed and get better.” Will nods, and slides further down against his pillows, watching until Bella has left the room, closing his door behind her, she reminds him less of his Dad now, his dad hadn't remembered to close a door once throughout Wills entire childhood.

As soon as the door clicks shut Will hunts down his phone and finds it in the little drawer next to his bed, it's dead.

Sighing, he swings his legs out of bed, shivering as the cold air hits him, and wanders off to the nurses station to beg for a charger. Having talked the youngest girl on duty into letting him borrow hers he retreats back to bed, plugging the phone in and waiting anxiously until he can turn the phone on. It takes forever for the phone to load, he keeps thinking it's broken, glaring at it for wasting time. He rarely turns it off so isn't sure if this is normal, but by the time it shows his home screen he's making plans to buy a new one.

As soon as it comes on, he brings up his contacts, noting absently that his hands are shaking, scrolling down until he finds Beverly, he stabs at her name and for a heart stopping moment he almost calls the barbers listed above her. He sits cross legged on his bed, listening to the call connecting then ringing. He drums his fingers on his leg, agitated, until she picks up.

“Will? S’up?” She sounds distracted.

“What's happened to Hannibal?” He blurts, suddenly feeling a wave of embarrassment crash over him as he realises that he's not behaving normally, he shouldn't be this invested.

There is a long pause, and Will tightens his fingers on his phone until he can hear the gadget creak in protest. “Hannibal?” Beverly sounds bewildered, “Mr. I'm too sexy for my prison jumpsuit? Him?”

“You think he's sexy?” Will asks completely floored, “Bev, he's been through hell.”

“Yeah, but doesn't mean I don't still have eyes, Will. He's a good looking man.”

“oh, oh, right.” Suddenly even more unsure as to why he's calling, and irrational irritation curdling under his skin, at both Hannibal and Beverly, Will considers hanging up and pretending he'd never rung her at all.

“Will, you still there? Hannibal’s fine, you know. Still in BSHCI, seems a little unfair if you ask me, nobody is mind, but he really did a number on Mason, something weird has been going on there you know. He still won't talk to anyone, well, asked Alana how you were the other day, he's pissed at Jack because she told him you were worse. By pissed, I mean is being excruciatingly polite, I've never seen social niceties weaponized in such a way before

Will. It's a shame you were sick. You'd have loved to see it, even Zeller was awed. Jack looked terrified."

Warmth rushes through him, settling in his stomach, and tingling through his limbs. "What's weird about it?"

"What?"

"You said there was something weird about?"

"Oh! Yeah, there is something odd about what happened there, something set this guy off. He's so calm now too. It's weird. I think it might have to do with the baby."

"Yeah , Jack mentioned the baby."

"Well, toddler really, cute as anything. Little boy, which is handy for Margot. It's specified in her father's will that only a boy can inherit. Her family lives in the 1800's apparently. Jack suspicious."

"He's always suspicious, I'd hate to be implicated in any crime, no matter how far fetched the idea, Jack would find me guilty by tea time."

Beverly laughs and changes the topic, steering their conversation away from Hannibal, putting the focus on Will's own improving health and chatting a little about work. After a few more minutes he rings off, and sits on his bed bouncing his knee restlessly trying to determine his next course of action.

Gnawing on his bottom lip, he shifts restlessly, wanting to get to the bottom of the situation without quite knowing what it is he wants to know and what's getting him so wound up. He wonders if he's picking up on the emotions of the other inhabitants of the hospital. If his feelings of dread and agitation are leached from others and not a true reflection of his own. Eventually slumps backwards and rolls into his side, still clutching his charging phone to his chest, he shuts his eyes and tries to drop off, but his mind won't slow enough to allow him to rest.

His thoughts revolve uselessly on the Verger Murder, why was Mason killed. He wants to believe that Hannibal had his reason for doing so and that it was a good one. He had seen the hovel where Hannibal had been kept and knows there is more to the story that simply Hannibal's own mistreatment. He's handled being locked away in BSHCI with aplomb, he hadn't seemed upset by his own captivity. The lose ends of the case's tapestry worry at Will's mind until he can't bare to lie there any longer.

He slides out of bed, dresses, pockets his phone carefully winding the cord of the charger around it and shoving on his plaid shirt over his t shirt. Before sneaking out of the ward, he knows that he could sign out, but is afraid that Jack will get wind of what he's up to, or worse yet Bella.

He walks across the parking lot trying to look like he's meant to be there, and slips into a nearby Starbucks to order a cab and get a coffee while he waits.

The drive over is endless, the driver is incapable of not giving Will his opinions on everything from his dress sense, his recklessness visiting a hospital for the criminally insane, to his thoughts on politicians. Will avoids making eye contact and mumbles vague agreements to everything the man says. He's never been so glad in his life to climb out of the car, bringing an end to the stilted conversation and more importantly the tedium of listening to another person's obnoxious thoughts.

Irritable, he storms into the hospital and is met with the receptionist's blank stare.

“Hello.” He greets nervously, trying desperately not to look like one of her patients.

“Hello?” She replies cautiously, giving him the kind of side eye someone would normally give a drunk they are afraid will start to get violent. “Do you have an appointment to visit somebody? Are you here to speak to staff or one of the patients?”

“Erm, me? I'm here to interview. Hannibal? Lecter. Dr. Lecter. The guy in the murder case?”

“Ohh.” The girls face brightens, and Will feels his opinion of her drop like a stone.

“Yes, and it's important FBI information so I will need to speak to him quickly it's urgent.” His hands are fisted on the edges of his shirt and the girl blinks up at him, her blue eyes wide with astonishment. Will takes a breath and makes a huge effort to moderate his tone of voice. “Please.”

“Sure,” she says picking up the phone and beginning to press numbers with the end of her pen, “ I'll just call Dr. Bloom, and the guys down on his level to get everything set up for you. No one told us you were coming.”

“It's all a bit last minute, there's no need to bother Alana though?” Will tries hopefully, kicking himself for not having thought this far ahead.

“It won't take a moment.” She waves him off before speaking into the receiver, while looking at something on her computer screen, ordering her dinner unless Will has lost his gift with his encephalitis.

He hovers anxiously in the reception, shifting his weight from foot to foot, a door thuds closed behind him and he near falls into the desk in front of him.

“Will?” Alana reaches out stopping short of making contact because she knows he doesn't like it much and she always takes great pains to be supportive to him. “What's going on, no one told me you'd be coming down.”

“Erm, yeah. I didn't tell Jack.” Alana opens her mouth to protest so he barrels quickly on. “I had an idea of what might have happened,” he blurts, his mouth writing cheques his brain just can't cash. “I wanted to come down and test my theory. It's about a motive. I need to get in there and do my thing? You know? Just ask a few questions. It won't take long?”

“Will, it's half 7? Couldn't it wait until tomorrow?”

Not wanting to admit he hadn't realised what time it was evening at all, he shakes his head vehemently not trusting himself to speak.

There is a pause, then Alana sighs, “alright Will, I'll get it setup.” She turns and walks away, “but I'm ringing Jack!” She calls over her shoulder.

Will blanks his expression as the receptionist looks at him curiously from underneath his lashes, she's a pretty girl, looks like a milkmaid from a chocolate advert, all smooth skin, blue eyes, blonde hair and dimples. He tries to summon some enthusiasm for her coy flirtation, but can't, he's too tired.

“Alright Will, we are ready whenever you are.”

Turning Will hurries after Alana, even as his brain tries to figure out what he's doing and what on earth he's going to tell Jack? Maybe he can blame his medications for this clear lack of mental clarity. Perhaps Alana can give him a bed in her hospital for the night, he snorts a laugh to himself, at the idea that if he's gone mad then he's done it very conveniently. Then swallows the sound back as Alana looks at him.

She leads him down to a dimly lit room, instead of the interview room with it's table, Hannibal is sitting in a cage.

A sound of wordless outrage leaves him before he can think about it. Hannibal's head snaps up, creepily quickly, like he's not even human. Will takes a step back, the clink of chains are the only sounds as Hannibal raises his hands as much as he can showing Will his empty palms. Alana looks from one to another, then settles on Will, raising her eyebrows.

“He's in a cage, why is he in a cage? He's in a cage? A cage? It's, why is-”

“We had to set this up very last minute, Will. This was the easiest way and Hannibal was asked about it. We would have waited until morning if he'd refused.”

Feeling guilty Will nods, wishing that he hadn't managed to get Hannibal locked away, not after his time in the Verger Mansion.

“Alright Will, stay behind the line. If you need anything just shout.” Alana waves, then leaves,the click, clop of her shoes retreats down the hallway.

As soon as she's out of sight Will drags the sole chair over the line and sits in front of Hannibal, about two feet away.

For a long moment they gaze at each other, Will curls his shaking hands into fists and looks over Hannibal assuring himself that he's alright.

“So, I didn't tell Jack I was coming and I sort of broke out of the hospital, and I told Alana I had a theory. I have no theories, Dr. Lecter. I need you to tell me something that I can tell Jack. I don't even know why I came here.” Will admits his words rushing out of him, before slowing to a trickle, he has a moment's simple pleasure in watching the surprise on Hannibal's face, evident as Hannibal blinks slowly like a cartoon character in a child's TV

show. He smiles down at his lap, feeling his face heat, it occurs to him he must look like a girl with a crush. Then ice slides through his veins. *Oh god, oh god.*

“What type of information would satisfy Jack Crawford, do you think?”

Startled Will is dragged out of his panic at his own revelation.

“Erm.” He says intelligently, “what about the baby?”

Hannibal looks at him as though he's gone completely mad. “Baby?” Forgetting his own question Will half thinks it's an endearment and his heart leaps. “Which baby?”

“Oh? Oh! Oh, yeah. Margot's her baby.”

“Nixon is four, he's hardly a baby.”

“Ok, yeah, Bev said toddler. She also said he knew you. He's yours? With Margot? Jack, well, it looks like an inheritance,” Will waves a hand, “thing.” He finishes lamely.

“Nixon is not my son,” Hannibal says succinctly, and Will feels a wave of relief run through him. “I lived in the same household and saw a lot of him, Mason was not safe for Nixon, and I would try to help Margot when I could, distract Mason from him. Or hide Nixon when he wouldn't be deterred.”

“He wasn't safe for his nephew.”

“Mason had a predilection that ran towards the helpless.”

“He was a pedophile?”

Hannibal looked away, his hands going white where they were locked around each other. Twisting in his lap, the only evidence of his discomfort.

“Will!” Jack appears in the doorway, his booming cry echoes of the walls. Will looks from one problem to the other and rubs his hands over his face, hiding his eyes.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will jumps violently, his heart leaping into his throat, he glances up at Jack from under his fringe aware he must look like a guilty teenager but unable to modify his behaviour to prevent it.

“Will!” Jack doesn't bother to lower his volume despite being about two feet away, and Will is gratified to see Hannibal jump this time too. The withering glance Hannibal sends Jack makes him giggle, nerves bubbling under his skin. “What are you doing? You aren't supposed to sit so close, you don't know what-” Jack reaches out and tugs Will back with unnecessary force, as though Hannibal is reaching between the bars snarling like a wild animal rather than sitting placidly with his hands neatly folded in his lap.

Will stumbles as he's moves backwards, trips over the edge his jeans that are now a touch too lose and are sitting low around his hips, the hems trailing on the floor. Hannibal reaches out to steady him, his handcuffs catch loudly on the bars and Jack tugs Will even closer.

“Jack!” Will regains his footing, inwardly curdling with embarrassment that he's being practically held in Jack’s arms, all the while Hannibal looks on, for a moment he wishes he could look cool and composed in front of Hannibal, impress him a little, rather than staggering about as graceless as a frightened deer on a frozen lake. He looks back at Hannibal who is standing in the cage now, his hands wrapped around the bars, leaning forwards so he's looking squarely between the bars. For the first time there is an real, evident expression on his face, he looks *displeased,* nothing so commonplace as angry or furious, more refined. But he is still managing to glare holes in Jack, suddenly Will can see the man who defended a child. A man who beat another man to death, Will can see the protective streak running through Hannibal. It should make him feel anxious or worried, instead he feels protected. “It's fine.” He's not sure once the words have left his mouth of they are for Jack or for Hannibal or both at the same time.

He pulls himself away from Jack a little and smooths a hand down his rumpled shirt, trying to look a little more dignified, he looks up and sees Hannibal's face soften slightly. There is warmth in his eyes that sets Will’s stomach swooping and he tears his eyes away hurriedly. Unfortunately this leads to him catching Jack's eyes instead, Jack has copied Bella in channeling his long dead father. Will can feel paternal disappointment radiating off Jack. He fidgets with his cuffs and shifts from foot to foot, hoping that Jack won't shout at him, at least not in front of Hannibal.

“Well?”

At the flat tone of Jack's voice, he can't help but curl into himself a little, he doesn't even have much of an excuse for running off half-cocked. As soon as the though half cocked floats through his mind, Will feels himself flush at the near double entendre and stares hard at shoes suddenly certain that if he looks up his thoughts will be written on his face for all to see.

“Will…” Jack sighs his name and Will's heart almost stops for a moment before he realises that Jack has mistaken his blush for guilty embarrassment rather than anything more juvenile.

“I had a theory.” He mumbles into the stretching silence.

He sees Jack go still in his peripheral vision, the way a hunting dog does before the chase, still but still crackling with energy.

“A theory?”

“Yeah,” Will shifts again and runs a hand through his hair, suddenly thanking his lucky stars that he has never been Mr social skills as now Jack isn't suspicious that he's trying to hide anything. Or at least no more suspicious than Jack normally is about everything. “About the Ripper case.”

At his words both other men in the room jerk as though he's applied a voltage to them.

“The ripper case? What about the Ripper case? Will?”

“We were discussing the possibility that the Chesapeake Ripper is cannibalizing his victims.”

Will twitches so hard he nearly falls over, half because he'd nearly forgotten Hannibal was even there and half because as soon as Hannibal said the words the trophies from all the case's suddenly make sense.

“Cannibalising? Like the Shrike? Two? In one year? Oh, god Freddie Louds is gonna have a field day. Can you take down the internet?”

Will blinks at Jack, then slides his eyes to the side to look at Hannibal who has a little half smile on his face as though this is the most fun he's had in years. It might well be, Will thinks sadly. He smiles back just to try and convey some gratitude towards Hannibal, but makes a mental note to ask him about it later.

“Who did you arrest?”

Jack nods his head, gesturing Will away from the cage all the while angling his body to cut Hannibal out of the picture.

“Abel Gideon.”

Jack turns to look back at Hannibal who smiles serenely back, his hands folded delicately in his lap, radiating charm.

“How,” Jack asks, his tone fraught and his shoulders stiff, “ did you know that?”

Hannibal looks at Jack, then looks at Will and for a long moment Will thinks he's not going to answer, then Hannibal shifts in his seat a little, “Abel is in the same hospital as I am currently being incarcerated in. When he killed that nurse it was a topic of much debate.” Hannibal pauses and Will watches him swallow, sees the movement of Hannibal's long throat and finds himself utterly mesmerized. “She was a very nice young woman, she's been taking good care

of me, Mr Crawford. Ever since I got here. All of the other patients have disapproved very strongly of Mr Gideon's actions. He's been very rude."

Will chuckles, before stifling the sound, cursing himself for looking like a complete mental case in front of both Hannibal and Jack. "Sorry." He says quickly, " I'm not sure rude is quite the right word." He offers to Hannibal.

"English is not my first or even my second language." Hannibal responds while inclining his head to accept Wills correction.

Where Jack's arm is pressed against his side Will feels him relax.

"You're a talented man, Dr. Lecter. I've had a look, you've got many articles published, got through Medical School by drawing anatomical figures?"

Will watches Hannibal feeling his heart sink a little, a scruffy grump covered in dog hair does not manage to charm a polyglot medic. Sighing internally he tries not to let the realisation hit him too hard, while suddenly longing once again for the security of his home, his dogs or at least his empty hospital room. Hannibal tilts his head to one side and smiles as an answer to Jack's question but doesn't volunteer anything verbally.

"That's a good catch, Will." Jack slaps him on the shoulder, and Will tries not to let it show on his face that he's no idea what Jack is talking about, having lost the thread of the conversation. "I'll mention the possibility of cannibalism to the officers conducting the interviews with Gideon."

Will nods as illumination dawns, he rubs his hands over his face, feeling his beard catching at his unbuttoned sleeves. "I had some thoughts on the Verger case too," he says hesitantly, wondering if he should bring up Hannibal's half shared though. He is reluctant in case he's got it wrong. He doesn't want to mess up Hannibal's defense. He should probably try to talk to the sister. What was her name?

"You should return to the hospital now, Will." Will glances over through his fingers, still framing his face. Hannibal half rises to his feet and wraps his hands around the bars loosely. "You look tired still."

"Yes," Jack rushes to agree, presumably trying to get out of Hannibal's bad books Will smirks. "I'll drive you, when you're released from the hospital you can come back and finish up the interviews with Dr. Lecter. I presume that will suit you best? Dr. Lecter?"

"Of course. Happy to be of assistance. But first," Hannibal beckons and without thinking Will steps forwards. Jack reaches up and grabs his arm alerting Will to the wiseness of his decision.

Gently, feather light, Hannibal touches the back of one hand to Will's cheek. Despite knowing that Hannibal is merely talking his temperature Will can't help but press slightly into the touch before he can stop himself. Will meets Hannibal's eyes warily, dark, reddish gaze meets his, unwavering, then the hand retreats, one finger nail glides softly across his cheekbone as it goes. It takes everything he's got not to lean forwards and chase the touch.

“You're not feverish. A little warm, perhaps but within normal parameters.” Hannibal says, Will notices he says it more to Jack than to him and turns to look.

Jack's eyes are huge and is looking between them. Will closes his eyes in resignation, knowing that this is going to be a *conversation* on the way back to the hospital.

“You do look tired though, still.” A gentle touch brushes over the back of his hand, just grazing gently over the faintly bruised skin where the cannula sits in the back of his hand. Will snaps his eyes back to Hannibal, who does his half smile, tilts his head and says clearly trying to be subtle and still pointed. “You should try to get plenty of sleep.”

Will feels a slow smile spread over his face and nods.

Jack shifts beside him. “Come on, it's late and it's a fair drive to the hospital. I'm sure you will be wanting to get some rest yourself, Dr Lecter.”

Will opens his mouth, then shuts it. Unsure of what it is he'd like to say. Then nods trying to convey, *something* ? Goodbye perhaps? No, not goodbye, good night? Because he will be coming back. Confused and edgy he keeps his eyes downcast and tries not to too obviously flee with Jack.

Alana is in the foyer when they are signing out. Will looks her up and down. She looks the same as she has ever done, slim, young and so very, pretty. She is wearing a red dress that compliments her skin tone and hair colour. He knows he used to feel as though he could love her, standing frozen in the act of signing his name on the visitors sheet he suddenly can't think what part of her. She has many admirable qualities but none seem as wonderful, as unique as they did even two weeks ago. She is still a lovely young woman, but now she seems bland in her loveliness. Nothing to set her apart from many similar women.

He puts the pen down on the desk with far more force than he intends and the clack of plastic hitting wood is loud in the nearly empty lobby. Both Alana and Jack jump and spin around to look at him, Will holds his hands up in apology, “ sorry, sorry, guess I misjudged now close the desk was.”

Alana's gaze clears and sympathy bleeds into her expression. Instead of pleading him, hinting at her interest, Will finds himself irrationally irritated by it, but swallows the emotion back.

“It'll take time,” she says and wraps him in a hug. Will leans into her soft embrace, the smell of her hair and perfume, pretty and feminine all around, and feels nothing beyond the warmth of a human touch meant to reassure. He holds he for a moment then eases himself away, making himself smile at her as he holds her at arm's length.

“Thank you for arranging this, I know it was unexpected.”

“Did you get what you needed?”

“A start.” He hedges.

“Well, that's great. It's something isn't it?”

“Something.” He agrees and Jack nods over her shoulder. He tugs himself gently out of her grasp and follows Jack out into the frigid air. It's dark now, cold and damp. He shivers as the cold seeps through his layers and settles next to his skin. Grateful when Jack unlocks the car and let's him clamber in.

With the heater on, blowing streams of warm air in his direction cocooning him in blessed heat, Will takes Hannibal's advice and leans his head back against the headrest of his seat and closes his eyes.

For a few minutes he waits for Jack to ask him, question him about the interaction he'd witnessed, but Jack says nothing.

Lulled by the quiet sounds of the tires on the road, the engine and Jack’s little mutters as he navigates himself back towards the hospital, Will relaxes into the upholstery and wades into his stream.

Chapter End Notes

Ok, so this chapter took me ages to write as I couldn't seem to get he lads to decide on a path. I'm still not entirely convinced about it but decided to go with it before I could talk myself out of it entirely. Hope it's alright!

Chapter 5

He’s in trouble for sneaking out, the nurses glare at him from a distance and the doctor who does the rounds the next morning spends several long minutes lecturing him on the importance of letting himself heal. Will spends the whole one sided conversation trying not to look as unrepentant as he feels, he attempts at first to use his FBI investigator card as a get out of jail free, but the tired looking doctor completely disregards him and continues lecturing.

Jack settles himself into the visitor's chair besides the bed and shuffles it slightly closer so he can see the screen, Will battles down an absurd instinct to hide the screen from his view and makes a big show instead of moving the laptop over, he deliberately pushes it too far, then corrects it back to more or less it's original position. Jack doesn't say anything and Will gazes at the screen, drumming his fingers impatiently on the little table the laptop is resting on. Despite having waited for the call to come through for nearly half an hour, with an increasingly agitated Jack beside him, he fumbles when the computer begins to announce that the transmission is coming through. He connects with shaking hands, and feels his face split into a grin when Hannibal's face fills half the screen.

“Hi,” he blurts, sounding far, far too cheery. Then he begins to notice little details, Hannibal has his hands chained around his waist and is wearing the mask about his face again. Will feels the grin drop off his face, but tries to gauge whether Hannibal might be smiling at him, he might be, it's hard to tell on a blurry screen when half his face is obscured from sight. “Why are you wearing that?”

“Hi, Will.” Alana cuts whatever Hannibal is about to say off, and waves jauntily at Will, “sorry.” She amends looking to her left at Hannibal, who relaxes a little. “It's protocol, i'm afraid. We need to be sitting next to each other so that we could set up this interview where we can all see each other and this was the only way the bureau would allow it.”

Peeved Will glares at Jack from under his fringe, just in case it was his idea, then returns his attention to the screen. “Looks uncomfortable? Are you alright?”

“I'm well, thank you, Will and Dr Bloom is quite correct in the need to adhere to protocol.”

Will hums a little under his breath, he wants to disagree but doesn't quite know how. Or why.

“Alright.” Alana clears her throat and uncaps a pen, laying it down on top of a stack of folders that are sitting in front of her, “shall we get started, Will? Hannibal? Is that alright with you?”

“It's quite alright with me.”

Will mutters some agreement at her, it's unintelligible but she doesn't bother asking him to speak up.

“Ok, well, Will? Take it from here? If you need a break just say.” She is looking at Will through the screen as she speaks but waves her hands to encompass everyone.

Besides him, Will sees Jack nod and stifles a smirk at the idea of Jack needing a break after he's been so tirelessly determined to get this set up.

“How long were you held at the Verger Estate?” He asks, making eye contact as best he can with Hannibal through the screen, as much as he hates to do so he feels anxious to support Hannibal through what must be a difficult interview for him.

“Nearly four years.”

“Four?” Will sounds appalled even to his own ears and turns to Jack, who nods.

“Adds up. His missing person's report was filed in 2009.” Jack mutters undertone having lent in so he can murmur directly into Will's ear. Having not noticed Jack was so close he jumps, startled.

“Did you know Mason Verger before that time?”

“I knew of him. I was treating Margot, patient Doctor confidentiality so you will have to ask her about the exact nature of her treatment.”

“According to patient logs at the hospital, Miss Verger had been admitted to the hospital 6 times in the months in the run up to your disappearance.” Jack interjects.

“Yes, that sounds like it will be about correct. I knew that she had been admitted on several occasions. I had treated her injuries on at least one occasion.”

“But that wasn't the sum total of your dealing with Miss Verger?” Will asks before Jack can ask anything else.

“No, I had passed my psychiatry exams several years before and was in the process of setting up my own practice, when I was abducted by Mason.”

“You were leaving medicine?” Will asks, bewildered, wondering how many masks Hannibal is wearing. It's like going to the opera with him, everytime he thinks he knows everything about Hannibal the man pulls of another mask to reveal more layers. “To become a psychiatrist?”

“I was considering swapping one branch of medicine for another.” Hannibal says, and Will wishes he could be there in person, between the mask and the poor quality screen he's having some trouble getting a good read on Hannibal's mental state.

“Why?” The question slips out before he has a chance to stop it.

“I killed someone.” Hannibal says flatly. Wills first though insanely is that he has to hide this information from Jack, he needs to cover for Hannibal, then his mind clicks into gear and he realises that Hannibal means as a surgeon. “Or more accurately, I couldn't save someone.” Hannibal confirms his thoughts and Will relaxes. “But it felt like killing them.” Hannibal nods slightly then looks away from the screen.

“You were an emergency room surgeon. It had to happen from time to time.” Will says trying to soften the blow, he knows cognitively that this occurred years ago, but he wants to soothe “It happened one time too many.” Hannibal replies, looking back at the screen, making eye contact and Will feels liquid heat trickle down his spine and has to fight not to shiver. “My plan was to transfer my passion for anatomy into the culinary arts. I wanted to fix minds instead of bodies, and I would be able to help my patient's safe in the knowledge that none of them would die a result of my therapy.”

Will nods feeling bleak, he can imagine the life that Hannibal was wanting. Aiding his patients by day then cooking for his friends or a lover in the evening. His mind wanders for a moment as he considers whether Hannibal might have or have had a lover.

“You're a cook, Dr Lecter?” Alana asks, sounding impressed, Will hates her for a moment, swearing inwardly that the next time she breaks her computer or has car trouble he is going to pretend he can't help her.

“I enjoy the artistry of cooking, yes. There is a seduction in preparing a dish, by hand, from start to finish, and watching those around you devour your art. To know yourself the cause of their satisfaction, it's a skill to be shared. Over the table or by passing on those skills to a protege.” Hannibal appears to answer Alana but through the screen he never breaks eye contact, Will swallows nervously and reminds himself that the sheet is thin and will his nothing at all.

Alana laughs brightly and pats at Hannibal's arm where it is restrained next to her. Will watches as Hannibal tears his eyes away from Will's and looks at her hand, as though he's never seen one before in his life.

“Were you treating Miss Verger for a mental complaint?” Will asks the pieces beginning to slot together.

“She had come to the hospital for injuries consistent with abuse.” Jack says loudly enough for everyone to hear this time, “she hasn't seemed upset about her brother's death at all, there doesn't appear to be any love lost between them.”

“Agent Crawford, you would have to speak to Miss Verger about her views on her brother.”

“But you were helping her, weren't you?” Will interjects. Immediately feeling bad as Hannibal sighs.

“I was attempting to,” he admits with the tone of man who is having his secrets prised from him. “I was attempting to keep her safe.”

“The Estate only passes to a male heir.” Will recalls suddenly, the conversation he'd had with Beverly crystal clear in his memory. “That's what you suggested to her?”

“Margot confided in me about certain details of her life at her brother's hands. I did suggest a way of making herself safer around her brother.”

“You though if she was carrying the Verger heir he would be less likely to harm her?”

“I suggested that having a family could provide Margot with the emotional outlet and support she so desired and a means of cementing her uncertain place in her household.”

“Miss Verger had a precarious existence?” Jack interjects again.

“Her father disinherited her due to her sexuality.”

Will blinks in surprise at Alana's smooth reply, turning slightly to look at Jack, who gazes back looking as bewildered as Will feels.

“Did you suggest to Miss Verger that she might be able to use her son to inherit of her brother was removed from the picture?” Jack asks his voice bland, so bland that Will stiffens at the implicit threat. He is half tempted to jump in and defend Hannibal, his mind jumps back to the insinuation that Mason was a peodphile and he finds himself considering if that wouldn't have been for the best.

“No.”

Will huffs a breath out as a tiny laugh, amused by the succinctness of the blunt reply. Besides him Jack shifts his weight and the chair creaks a little.
“No? Seems a bit odd then that after she had her son her brother ended up dead?”

“I had no.way of knowing that she would have a boy Agent Crawford. I spoke to Margot and she mentioned wanting children the rest was simply observation. A child would provide an anchor for Margot and would require care during their early years. This would give Margot the structure in her life that was lacking. She felt it would an heir would be something that would draw her brother in, given him a focal point to rally around. Mason was very protective of his family image. Margot though a new heir would provide stability for them both.”

“But it didn't work?” Will guesses, and is surprised when Hannibal shrugs his shoulders casually.

“In a manner of speaking in the beginning. Of course he was displeased that she had taken such independent action without his consent. However, Mason was enthralled by Nixon, even when Nixon was a tiny baby. We all hoped he would do better for Nixon's sake.”

“When did you end up with the Verger's? And why?”

“Mason found out about his sister's pregnancy and was..” Hannibal pauses and tilts his head to the side, brow furrowing slightly.

“Angry?” Will asks, considering Margot's family were the kind of people to denounce her for being gay he could well see that her brother might be upset by a baby out of wedlock.

“Furious would be closer to the mark, I think, he thought I had something to do with the baby's conception. On a physical level rather than that of a confident and a friend to Margot.”

“He thought you were Nixon's biological father?” Jack leans so far forward towards the screen that Will is convinced he's going to fall of it at any moment, and he tries to work out in the privacy of his own mind whether he wants to see it happen or not.

Hannibal nods calm and collected, Will feels himself tense again, he doesn't want to ask again wants to let Alana or Jack ask in case it looks too obvious when he does it but if unable to stop himself from asking sharply, “but you're not?”

“No, Will. No, I am not Nixon's father.” Hannibal says it soothingly and his hand comes up before being stopped by the chains at his waist. “I am first and foremost his Mother's friend.”

“Why did Mason not kill you?” Will glares at Jack for asking such a blunt question, deep down he knows it's not an unreasonable one, but fury licks at him. He's tempted to dump Jack the rest of the way off his chair in retribution, instead he pokes a finger at the plastic casing of the laptop, angling it closer to himself so that Jack has to sit even more awkwardly, straining to see.

“He was going to Agent Crawford. Margot talked him around. I'm an unsure as to the precise nature of that discussion, you will need to speak to her yourself.”

“What was he going to do to you?” Will glares at Jack, wanting desperately to step in but not being sure how or when. Both men seem to have forgotten that he and Alana are even there and are firing questions at each other. Will looks at Alana to see that she looks just as discomfited by Jack's aggressive questioning than he does.

“Mason liked to have people who displeased him fed to his pigs.”

Oh god Will thinks *I ate sausages made from Verger pork. They were so tasty. My dogs ate them.* Immediately he regrets his last though and his head swims as he considers that he's possibly ingested human flesh. “Alive?” He asks aghast, he can hear the tremble in his voice, as his active imagination kicks in and his brain is filled with the images of squealing pigs and tortured screams.

“Will, Will, breath with me. In and out. Will can you hear me? Listen to my voice and breath, slowly, in and out.” Shivering and pushing the vivid images of Hannibal's blooded flesh being stripped from his bones, in long strips, in his mind it looks like someone peeling a carrot, Will listens to the soothing words and tries to obey. “Good, good, very good. Will keep going. Can you help us to understand what upset you about that?” Hannibal asks and his voice is just the right mix of concerned and interested that it helps Will to gather himself. If Hannibal had sounded too sympathetic it would have made him feel pathetic but the curiosity helps him feel less like a child being coddled.

“I have an overactive imagination, it's how I reconstruct crime scenes.”

“Ahh, yes, the overabundance of mirror neurons.” Will starts in surprise and it must be a large enough movement that it is evident even over the poor quality transmission. “My apologies, Will. Was it a secret I overheard it being mentioned by I think, Dr Chilton? On the day you were diagnosed.”

“No, no it's fine.” He plasters on a smile and tries to look more stable, no one likes a man who falls apart at the drop of a hat he reminds himself. “I just pictured yo-people dying that way.” He stumbles not wanting to give too much of himself away.

“Perhaps we should finish here.” Alana suggests she is looking closely at Will and Will feels his shoulder muscles clenching tighter under her examination.

“No,” Jack says flatly, standing up and putting one hand on the little table next to the laptop and leaning in. Around his arm Will watches both Alana and Hannibal recoil slightly and assumes that their screen is now almost entirely filled with an image of angry Jack's face. Jack shoves away and walks towards the window, looking out over the carpark as though it's the most interesting thing he's ever seen. “No, if you feel as though you can carry on Dr. Lecter I think that we should the sooner we can get to the bottom of this then the sooner we can get the ball rolling for you.”

Will looks back at the screen and watches Alana watching Hannibal, who looks as unruffled as always. “I would prefer to finish this interview now, Agent Crawford as long as all parties are in agreement?”

Will nods, he just wants to finish this so he can go back to quietly examining his emotions and figuring out where his hetrosexuality went. Onscreen Hannibal shifts and stretches, even with the terrible picture quality there has a lithe sense of grace to the movement. Will mentally waves as his hetrosexuality wanders a little further away into the distance.

“So Mason just kept you?”

“It is unwise to simply release someone who has knowledge that could bring down your entire way of life.” Hannibal doesn't get visibly annoyed with Alana when he speaks but Will can almost sense his irritation.

“Why didn't you try to leave, or call for help.” For a moment Will tunes out of the conversation so he can put his vivid imagination to use picturing himself smacking Jack upside the head while asking Jack why he's just letting Will do it. *Way to victim blame, there* Jack. “...did you feel obligated?”

“Yes, Agent Crawford, I felt a staggering amount of obligation. I feel responsibility. I've fantasized about scenarios where my actions may have allowed a different fate for Nixon. And Margot, both of them. Also for myself. He adds it at the end almost as an afterthought and Will feels a rush of sadness for him.

“As for not trying to obtain help. I did try that on one occasion. And I was severely punished for the attempt. It was made clear to me that the next time I tried Margot would receive the same. I was not about to do that too her.”

“What did he do to you?” Will asks, his hands clenched on the laptop's casing as he drags it closer.

“I received a brand.” Hannibal shifts in his seat slightly then doesn't say anymore.

“I'm sorry.” Will clutches the laptop a little harder watching as his fingertips blanch with the strain.

“Will-” Hannibal pauses, then shakes his head slightly and Will feels his fingers relax a little on the plastic casing at the tone his name is spoken in. It's almost revertant, warmth shot through the single syllable. “It was several years ago now.”

Besides him, Jack hums again but Will doesn't bother drawing his gaze away long enough to look at him, just keeps on watching the little screen.

“What happened on the night in question?” He asks, wanting suddenly, desperately, to drag this whole ordeal to it's conclusion.

“The night Mason was killed?” Hannibal leans back in his chair, folds one long leg over the other, slightly clumsily due to the chains, the folds his hands together. “He and Margot were having dinner, I was sitting with Nixon, it was past his bedtime really but he was practicing his piano.” Hannibal's face softens, a smile cracking loose and spreading over his face. “Well, he was just hitting the keys really. Then Margot screamed.”

“And what did you do?”

“I went running. I was worried for her. Mason had a predilection for children, well anyone he perceived to be vulnerable, but especially children. We were very careful to guard Nixon, but he suggested that he take Nixon away for a few days. Apparently to begin to teach him about the business, but… Margot refused. Given that Nixon is not yet four, it seemed premature. To say the least. When I arrived he had a hold of Margot necklace. I thought he would kill her.”

“So you reacted.” Jack finished, nodding, then mirrors Hannibal's posture, leaning back in the chair beside the bed and rubs his hands over his face. “You saved her life.” Will feels his spine relaxing at the words, and sinks back against his own pillows, a rush of warmth towards Jack bubbles up inside him, his previous irritation bleeds away.

“As soon as I had put a stop to it, I had Margot call for the police and I confessed my guilt. I have attempted to be as much help to both the local police and to yourselves as possible.”

Alana nods, “model prisoner,” she jokes.

“I've had plenty of practice.” Will clenches his hands on the need to reach through the screen and provide some physical reassurance, squeezes his hands together until they ache with it. The ache in his hands a distraction from the ache sitting under his ribs.

Jack blows out a breath, rubs his hand over his chin again and stands up with a sigh, “well, thank you, Dr Lecter. Now we've got your testimony we'll be able to corroborate your story

with other witness testaments.” Jack turns on his heel and strides out of the door, he turns again holds out a hand in farewell then disappears.

“Thanks for all your help, Will.” Alana says, and Will watches helplessly, as she reaches to end the call.

“Wai-” despite his protest the screen goes black for a moment before his screensaver appears a picture of Will and his dogs. He's not updated the picture since he got Winston, and for a few minutes he let's the thought of updating his laptop's screen saver distract him from the fact that his connection to Hannibal has just been severed. He has no means of contact now, no excuses. He didn't even get a chance to say good bye.

He slams the lid of the laptop shut with far more force than necessary. Slides down until he's lying on his side, then pulls his knees up towards his chest and shuts his eyes.

A savory smell wakes him, Will rolls over, feeling his hair sticking to the side of his face and his pant leg riding up around his left calf. “Smells delicious.” He mumbles in the direction of the nurse, trying to keep the amazement out of his voice, so far everything he's been served has had all the appeal of wet cardboard.

“Silkie chicken in a broth. A black-boned bird prized in China for its medicinal values since the 7th century. Wolfberries, ginseng, ginger, red dates, and star anise.” The voice is much deeper than any of his nurses and Will almost gives himself whiplash trying to sit up. A few feet away Hannibal is pulling dishes out of a little bag. Will rubs his eyes wondering if this is another relapse, looks harder at the suit Hannibal is wearing and wonders what is says about him if he's imagining *Hannibal wearing plaid* , Hannibal turns slightly towards him, *and dear god above, paisley.*

Wonderful if this is a more potent sign of mental deviency than anything he ever did or hallucinated before he was diagnosed it takes him a moment to process what Hannibal has actually said to him.

“You made me chicken soup?” He asks touched, if this is real then Hannibal can only have been released on bail either late last night or early this morning. This must be one of his first acts as a free man. Will smiles down at his own fingers.

“Yes.” Hannibal sounds a little put out and he's paused where he stands putting the plates out.

Will kicks himself for being so dismissive, and scrambles out of bed, “fancy chicken soup.” He amends quickly, sliding into the chair opposite where Hannibal stands. To his relief Hannibal sinks into it and smiles, lines near his eyes crinkling.

“Fancy.” He agrees.

Chapter 6

He wakes up, the rattle of his phone vibrating against the floor, jerking him awake. He scrambles for the device, nearly tipping himself out of bed in his efforts to find it.

He's been home for a few days now, it was a huge relief to be released from the hospital, to be back in the safety of his own space, but he hasn't heard a word from Hannibal.

Not that he had expected to, they hadn't exchanged numbers after all. But he can't shake the disappointment he feels everytime he gets a call or a message only to see Alana's name on the screen, or Beverly, or Jack on one gruffly awkward occasion. Never Hannibal. Despite all the evidence that this time will not differ from those before it, he scrambles for his phone, his heart beating madly, hope blossoming.

He finds his phone, half under yesterday's T-shirt, and turns it over to see- Alana.

Dismay sweeps through him and it takes him a moment to find the heart to even open the message.

Feel up for a walk? The gang miss you. X

He glares down at the screen, willing reality to shift and the same message to have come from another source, but the rules of the universe stubbornly refuse to bend to his will. Grumbling he heads to shower and dress, while firing off a text confirming his attendance.

Showered and ready he spends nearly a quarter of an hour wandering through his house, muttering “keys, keys.” to himself before finding them in the pocket of the jacket he came home in nearly a week ago.

In the car he turns the radio on then almost immediately turns it off when the presenters voice sets his teeth on edge due to the manic tone of their voice. The silence presses down on him and he can feel his mood slump. He gives up and puts the radio back on listens to an obnoxious pop song as he drives along.

He’s relieved to arrive and shut the engine off, climb out of the car and feel the air, fresh and cool in his lungs. He's the first to arrive so he hangs about waiting, a woman walks past with a small child. She's holding it's hand as the child, who know whether it's a boy or girl due to the thick layers it's bundled in, stumbles along. He watches, half smiling, the woman looks up and he smiles at her. She tightens her hand on the child's, then picks it up and walks quickly away.

Will watches her go, taken aback, he'd only tried to be friendly.

“Will!”

It's his only warning, bar a metallic clunk, before he's buried in a tidal wave of wagging tails and furry bodies.

“Hey!”

He drops to his knees, despite the cold ground and grabs a hand full of furry coat and rubs at the ears of the closest dog, while the others mill around him nosing and whining for his attention.

“Hi.” Alana greets him, pink cheeked from the cold, but her smile bright and warm.

“Hey, thanks for looking after them.”

She laughs and makes an off hand gestures as though batting away his words.

“Alana!”

Will jumps and half turns to see another young woman with a child in tow, and behind them striding along, looking just like the styalised crane Will had one seen on a fancy plate that one of his neighbours had had on their wall while growing up, is Hannibal. Wearing the most ridiculous hat. It takes everything Will has not ask Hannibal is he's aware that some kind of animal, possibly a raccoon, has died on his head.

His heart lifts, and he beams up at Hannibal. Happy to see him despite his penchant for wearing bobcats on his head.

“Will.” Hannibal says, he tilts his head slightly and gives a small smile while managing to radiate fondness. Will grind back, then drops his eyes and pets Buster as the dog stands up on his hind legs and plants his paws on Will’s stomach.

“Hey!” He replies, not quite able to look directly at Hannibal, despite having wanted to see him for days.

“Will,” Hannibal says again, “ it's good to see you. You look much improved.”

He holds out a hand and Will grabs it, let's Hannibal tug him back onto his feet. They stand, Will feels hyper aware of his hand wrapped in Hannibal's.

“Ah! Good, glad you could make it.”

Will jumps violently, having completely forgotten that Alana existed. Never mind that she was a few feet away. Blushing he grabs his hand back and stuffs them into his pocket, stepping away. Creating a distance.

Feeling awkward and anxious suddenly. The dogs mumble and grumble at his feet clearly feeling his sudden distress. He's glad for the necessity of hushing them.

Alana smiles warmly at Hannibal, and Will tries not to glare at her as she and Hannibal exchange pleasantries for a few moments.

Shall we?” Margot breaks in. She gestures along the path, “no, Nixon.” Will looks as the little boy tries to pull away from her to get to the dogs.

“They're friendly.” He tells her, and she pauses then looks over his shoulder, before relaxing and releasing Nixon's hand. The boy immediately entertains himself petting Winston and the bigger dogs.

“Let's walk.” Alana links her arm through Margot's and the two women walk on, the dogs set off with Nixon in hot pursuit.

Hannibal gestures for Will to start moving and after a split second he does, and follows on.

For a few minutes, they say nothing. Will can't think of anything to say that isn't boring, or redundant. Eventually he realises that the silence is easy and companionable rather than strained and awkward, so he relaxes into it.

“I have been considering the purchase of a house.”

Hannibal breaks the silence.

“Yeah?”

Hannibal hums, then half turns his head to look at Will out of the corner of his eye and smiles. “I've had my fill of hotel rooms and jail cells, I can assure you.”

Will chuckles, “oh? And that jumpsuit was such a good look on you too.” He jokes.

“As that maybe, however, I have found a house on the outskirts of Boston. All being well, I should be able to move in within a few weeks. A month or so at the outside.”

“I though you said considering, seems quite decided.”

Hannibal hums a little again, “there are still factors at play.”

They stroll along, chatting idly, until they reach a pond at the edge of a wooded area. The water is dark and a few ducks are paddling forlornly about.

Hannibal pulls a bag out of his pocket and crouches. “Nixon.”

The boy bounds over, full of the energy of youth and grabs a messy hand full of the bags contents before throwing it haphazardly at the ducks. Who begin to swim closer, despite the dogs.

“Bread?” He asks.

“No, it's not good for ducks.” Hannibal says, looking up from where he's crouched at Wills feet. “ It's a mixture of oats and seeds.”

Will watches the image Hannibal makes, sharp edges and ridiculous clothing, helping Nixon feed the ducks and smiles.

Alana clears her throat loudly and Wills glances over at her. “How's Abigail?” She asks.

Will sighs, “no change.” He admits, his chest tight.

He can feel Hannibal's gaze and nods at him so Alana will fill both him and Margot in on the details.

She explains about Abigail's injuries, while Nixon continues to feed both the ducks and Wills lurking dogs.

“You ended up killing the Shrike.” Margot asks, “ I read that he'd been killed in the papers, I had no idea that it was you.”

Will looks at her and shrugs helplessly. “If I hadn't he would have killed her, she's just a child.”

“Sometimes, you have to take a life to save a life.” Hannibal says, his voice mild and even.

Will looks at him, relief filling his chest as it occurs to him that there is someone else her who understands. Hannibal has been there too.

“Yes, like you.” he breathes, making eye contact. Letting the warmth of Hannibal's gaze settle into his bones.

“Hannibal’s not naughty!”

The whole group of adults startled at Nixon's outburst, the little boy has tears in his eyes as he holds onto Hannibal's sleeve.

Hannibal stands pulling Nixon up to sit on his hip as he does. Nixon puts two fingers in his mouth and mumbles incomprehensibly around them. “No,” he agrees.

They begin to drift back towards the cars, Alana walks between Hannibal and Will, “he's regressing a little.” Hannibal tells her in tones of quiet worry.

“That's quite normal, Hannibal. Especially where there is disruption or trauma.”

“I'd heard that, but my area of expertise is adults, Alana. I'm glad to have it confirmed, it'll put Margot's mind at ease.”

“I'll talk to her. He seems quite happy really?”

“He is healing as we all are.”

Alana smiles and touches him gently on the arm then puts on a burst of speed to catch up with Margot who is now carrying a sleepy Nixon herself.

“Are you, healing that is?”

“I think so, time heals all wounds as they say.”

“Difficult though after what you've been through.”

“I am taking proactive steps, by getting a house I am retaking a space space of my own.”

“That's good,” Will nods, he wants to ask Hannibal about how he's coping, but can't think how to bring it up without coming across as crass.

They reach his car and he herds the dogs into the back. Alana waves off his thanks again, before helping Margot get a cranky Nixon into the car, both women wave as they drive off.

“It must feel good to see them both safe.”

“Very good, as I suspect it feels good for you to know your young Abigail is in the best of hands. Far from the reach of her father.”

“Not completely out of danger, but as close as I could make it.”

“You did what needed to be done.”

“So did you.” Will looks up at Hannibal, they are close, standing elbow to elbow beside his old, worn car.

“It feels good to know that they can truly begin to live now.” Hannibal says his voice soft. “Even at the expense of another.”

Will rubs his neck, “I felt that too. After-”

“It's normal,” Hannibal tells him, sincerely. “Completely normal.”

It's on the tip of Wills tongue to tell Hannibal how right it felt to take out Abigail's tormentor. How virtuous, but he can't bring himself to say the words. Instead he nods, leaning in slightly.

“Thanks,” he says instead. “ I was a little, uh, worried? I guess, after I killed the Shrike.” He rubs at his stubble. “I didn't feel guilty, you know?”

Hannibal smiles gently and nods. “Desire to protect, Will. It is strong in us all. Bred into us, coded in our DNA. We seek to protect our children, our homes, our way of life. The mongoose I want under the stairs when the snakes slither by.”

Chapter 7

Will stands on the sidewalk, the rain is coming down almost horizontally due to the wind. He's clutching a bottle of wine and looking up at the building, blinking his rapidly dampening fringe out of his eyes.

He presses the buzzer again and waits, pressing closet into the shelter of the building.

After a few long moments the door opens and Jack usher's him into the hallway.

“Will!” He booms jovially, “glad you could make it. Bella has been asking after you, she's so pleased you could make it. Come on.”

Jack gestures and leads the way up the stairs and up to his front door, then holds it open while gesturing for Will to step inside in front of him.

Damp and trying not to shiver he does, the apartment is warm, and it's a ball after the wintery weather outside. The first thing that catches his eye is a photograph of Jack and Bella, younger and less careworn, abroad somewhere. Sunkissed and smiling.

“She's a beautiful woman.” Jack muses aloud following Will's gaze.

“Who is this mystery woman?” Bella's dry tone enquires from behind them. Will half smiles, half rolls his eyes and leaves them to flirt, and coo at each other. He knows they are both relieved that Bella is home and doing better for her treatments.

“Will, so glad you made it. I was wondering if you would come.” Beverly pops her head around the door and beckons him through. The sitting room is cosy and already full. He head for a corner and hovers behind one of the armchairs trying to be invisible and go unnoticed. Price and Zeller sit on a loveseat nearby and bicker about the correct route to get home without meeting traffic on a weekday. Will looks across at Alana, lounging in another armchair, her legs crossed and her left hand cradling a glass of wine, while she rubs the pad of her forefinger over her thumb nail. She gives Will a wide eyed look of *'you hearing these guys'* and he shakes his head in response.

“Will you be coming back to work soon?” Beverley asks.

Will shrugs, “depends on Baltimore's killers, doesn't it?”

Price hums a response and turns a little so he can look back at Will. “It's been quiet without you. Everything got very exciting after you joined us. First the Shrike, then you got ill on the job. Jack was nice to us all for days. He felt guilty you know. Next time I’m late with some paperwork, I'll pay you in puppies to go and tell him you've got the sniffles. He'll be too busy making sure you're not about to croak that he won't even notice what I'm up to.”

“Never mind the paperwork!” Zeller chimes in, “ half day Friday, anyone?”

“I'm down.” Beverly says.

Will shoots her a *'hey'* look, and she shrugs one slim shoulder and looks back at him, choreographing *'well, after three on Friday is drinks time, Graham.'* so expertly that he can even hear the inflection she would put on the words in his head.

“What are you down for?” Jack asks.

“Nothing!” Everyone assures him in total unison.

Jack gives them his patented, *'yeah, right. Assholes.'* stare and everybody, bar Zeller, looks away.

“Ah, hello Hannibal, we’re so glad you could make it. Jack! Jack, Hannibal's here!”

Will feels his heart lurch unsteadily in his chest at the mere mention of Hannibal's name, trying to look calm as he can feel Beverly's eyes on him. Jack turns and steps back into the hallway, and Will defiantly refuses to look at Beverly. He can see her miming something at him in his peripheral vision, he just knows it's about whether this is 'Mr. I'm too sexy for my prison jumpsuit.’ and he isn't going to encourage her.

Behind her Hannibal walks in, Bella has her hand on his arm and she's laughing at something he's said to her. Will chokes on his breath, Hannibal has abandoned the maniac suits for the evening and is wearing a red sweater. It fits him perfectly, he looks at once fitter and trimmer than he does in his suits and infinitely more touchable. Will clenches his hands on the top of the armchair in front of him, digging his nails into the fabric as he allows himself to acknowledge that he wants to *touch* Hannibal. Actually touch him. He'd managed to admit his crush to himself, but he'd never really thought too much about it, never tried to imagine Hannibal out of his prison attire or his peacocking, showy suits. Now he can't prevent himself from picturing tugging the awful, lovely, touchable sweater of Hannibal.

He has half a moment to consider how he'd make it look like an accident. Could 'whoops, I appear to have set you on fire, never mind, just pop your clothes off’ work? Probably not he admits to himself as Bev clears her throat loudly and he comes back to himself with a start.

Only to realise he's been standing in ridgid silence, clinging to Jack's furniture like it's all he has in the world, staring at Hannibal's torso.

“Table.” He blurts.

The whole room looks at him, regards him with varying shades of amusement (Bev and Zeller) through confusion, (Jack) all the way to the knowing smirk that rests on Bella's face.

“What's that?” She asks him, taking pity on him. Presumably because she thinks a little show of good cop will make him more likely to spill his guts later when she plays bad cop. And she's absolutely right, he is prepared to admit within the confines of his own mind. How Jack hasn't hired *her* to deal with criminals he'll never know.

“I said,” he says, lying, “I should help you set the table. Can't expect you to do everything.”

She looks at him, just long enough to make him sweat that she's going to tell him that he doesn't need to bother, and leave him instead to find the self control to not resort to flirting techniques involving arson. He may not be a social genius but he doesn't think anyone has persuaded anyone else to date them by reenacting Joan of arc. Then she gives in, “sure, that would be a big help. Thank you.”

It takes a blink for him to catch up with what she means having begun to mull over the latest problem in his life. *The Sweater.*

It has its own capitals he decides, as he shuffles awkwardly after Bella, Bev makes the schoolyard 'gaaayy’ sign at him. Pressing the pointer fingers of both hands together repeatedly while giving him the flirty eyebrows.

He starts reconsidering his plan of setting knitwear on fire, just a subtle alterations as to the owners of said knitwear and he could be on the way to a much nicer evening in police custody.

In the kitchen diner, Bella shuts the door firmly and turns to goes to get wine out of the rack.

“Knives and forks in the drawer on the right, no, your other right. Got that? Good, ok then, spill.”

He considers playing dumb, but he knows how observant she is. He hadn't been particularly subtle either, he knows.

“It was a nice sweater.” He hedges.

The look she gives him could strip paint, he mentally adds painter and decorator to the list of industries that must be feeling the lack of Bella’s talents.

“Will, honey. That wasn't a ‘tell me where you got your clothing from’ look. It was a ‘take your clothes off’ look. I know, I've been married for a long time and I was there I saw the look.”

“No-”

“Sweetheart, don't try to bullshit me.”

He twitches when she swears, somehow surprised to hear the word leaving her lips.

“That was a-” she turns, wine bottle in hand and tuts, “knives, forks! Come on.”

He jumps again, and reaches for drawer handles, dragging open the nearest one, finding only the obligatory drawer full of takeaway leaflets, rubber bands, keys and money from foreign countries, he shuts it and moves on until he finds cutlery.

Gathering hand fulls of silverware, he turns and nearly jumps a third time, when he finds Bella right in front of him.

“Just invite him out for coffee.”

“But, no- Bella, he-”

“Clearly wants to, he'll be flattered. He was very angry with Jack you know? When you were ill. Poor Jack. He just didn't understand. He kept saying ‘he’s so polite, but he clearly hates me.’” She grins, her expression amused and warm with her mischief.

He sets the table, concentrating on the simple task, allowing himself the time to calm.

Bella pushes a glass of wine into his hand and he takes a greedy gulp. Letting liquid courage flood his veins.

The others filter in and stars talking their seats, Bella directing people where she wants them.

“Ideally we'd go boy girl, boy, girl, but we don't have enough women here. I'll have to put you here, Will.” He looks over knowing from the tone of her voice that she's got a plan, and that he's not going to like it much. Immediately, he spots her plan, he's pointing at a the space between Jack and Hannibal. Resigning himself to the inevitable of making a fool of himself he shuffles over trying not to make eye contact.

He slides into the seat between Jack and Hannibal, across from him Zeller has a huge shit eating grin on his face. Will taps his shin with his foot, not hard enough to hurt but hard enough that Zeller knows he can if he wants to. Sadly, it does nothing to reduce the smile on Zellers face.

“Will?”

It seems like a hush has descended over the softly spoken word, as though the whole table is waiting on what Hannibal will say next, Will drags his eyes up off the table cloth to meet the rusty, reddish brown of Hannibal’s gaze, instinctively leaning in as Hannibal lowers his voice.

“It's good to see you again, Will.”

“Yeah, you too.”

He feels self conscious with the others around, as though this, *whatever* with Hannibal is delicate, a sputtering flame he needs to shelter from the wind.

As the evening wears on, and the drinks flow smoothly, the conversation becomes first comfortable, then increasingly intimate. He only really becomes aware of it when Jack asks him to pass the water and it takes him by surprise to remember that they’re not alone. He sits back in his chair and tries to engage in the group conversation, never the extrovert it becomes easier and more entertaining to watch Hannibal socialise. He's well aware that Hannibal must have missed this. Must have been starved for company, for the presence of people.

He likes just sitting letting the conversation flow over him, around him, like a version of wading into the stream. Without the fish and the water, instead he has the heights of Hannibal's cheekbones, the odd shade of his eyes and the soft red sweater to juxtapose the lines and harsh planes of his face.

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